

April 2021

State Director's Angle

The Courage to Keep Giving... and Keep Going

By State Director Michael Leach

I have a favorite quote posted on my wall from Margaret Mead, that I look to often, and it reads: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*

When I think of this quote, I think of all the transformation we are trying to undergo as an agency. Every day, a collectively small but mighty group of DSS employees is striving to change people's lives – to promote safety, security, and stability for our most vulnerable citizens across this state. People come to us in their most dire times of need and it is our life's work to come alongside them and determine what supports, services, and resources we can provide to help them get stronger and succeed as an individual, or a family.

The quote from Mead also reminds me that DSS is not in this work alone. We have so many dedicated partners across South Carolina working right alongside us serving children and families and their support is vital to our ability to achieve our mission. The days get long and the work is so hard, and it is sometimes easy, and natural, to get discouraged and feel like you are spinning your wheels and wondering if you are actually making a difference. Well today, I just want to reiterate that you are making a difference in the life of every individual you touch. And we must remember that just one interaction with a family could be the one that



determines their view of the work we do... or even their life trajectory.

I am so proud of the work we are doing TOGETHER every day. I know it is difficult, and I know sometimes it is draining, but it is oh so important and meaningful. Thank you for GIVING and for NOT GIVING UP!

DSS Recognizes April Employees of the Month

Eight DSS professionals were recognized by Director Michael Leach as Employees of the Month on April 8th.

Recognized for their hard work and leading with Competence, Courage, and Compassion for the month of April are Joanne Freeman, Financial Services, State Office; Salley Branch, Continuous Quality Improvement, State Office; Carsen Yates, Child Support Services, Lowcountry Region; Lucas Oates, Legal Services, Georgetown County; Teneisha Morris, Economic Services, State Office; Tamara Phillips, Child Protective Services, Anderson; Cristel Johnson, Child Protective Services, Lexington County; and, Keri Singleton, Adult Protective Services, Richland County.



The recognition celebration with the Director was held virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. Each honoree has the use of a designated parking space for the entire month. They also received a DSS lapel pin and a gift card for purchasing lunch during the virtual luncheon and an announcement sent to their local newspaper. Congratulations!

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



Leaders Show Solidarity in Addressing Child Abuse and Neglect

Gov. Henry McMaster designated April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. On April 6th, he was joined by DSS State Director Michael Leach, Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette, and other child-serving organizations and agencies for a ceremony at Riverfront Park in Columbia. S.C. State Child Advocate Amanda Whittle and Children's Trust CEO Sue Williams also spoke.



"South Carolina's most precious resources are its children," said Governor McMaster. "Bringing awareness to the harsh realities of child abuse and educating ourselves on the signs of abuse is a critical step towards ensuring a safe and bright future for our children." What happens in childhood can last a lifetime. Research shows that adversity in a child's life can have long-lasting negative health and social effects into adulthood. Happy, healthy children have better odds of becoming thriving, productive adults.

"Now more than ever, South Carolina families need us – organizations, governmental agencies, businesses, communities, neighborhoods, faith-based groups, and individuals – to join together," S.C. Department of Social Services State Director Michael Leach said. "When we support families where they are in life, our communities become stronger and more resilient, and children grow up healthy, nurtured and safe."

Read more about Child Abuse Prevention Month [here](#).

Pinwheel Planting Day is always a major part of Child Abuse Prevention Month. On Friday, April 16th, DSS team members and community partners around the state gathered to plant them in the ground as a visible reminder of our daily mission to keep children safe.



Professionals Join Together to Strengthen Foster Children and Youth

Project ECHO is a nationally recognized training model for primary care providers who see children and youth in foster care.

Support for this series has been provided by Select Health of South Carolina. Participating practitioners include physicians, nurse practitioners, nurse care managers, and other members of the community of child welfare advocates. Clinics began in January and continue to have interest and high attendance. The ECHO model encourages a cohort to build a cohesive team to develop professional connections to reach out to each other when questions arise.

Work in this area has led to the creation of a medical provider page on our DSS webpage <https://dss.sc.gov/foster-care/for-health-care-providers/>, social media presence, and upcoming meet and greet meetings for medical practices to get to know DSS nurses. There are several remaining sessions. The next is April 13th, which focuses on creating after-visit summaries from electronic health records. On April 27th, the topic will be "Understanding Psychotropic Medication in Primary Care." To find out more, including how to register, go [here](#). Organizers are discussing a second series next fall due to the positive feedback that has been received.

New Funding Available!

- Basic Needs
- Ca\$h
- Housing
- Tech
- Education
- Transpo
- Advice

PANDEMIC AID
FOR FOSTER YOUTH & ALUMNI (age 14-26)

Pandemic Aid for Foster Youth & Alumni Available from Federal Sources

Young people between the ages of 14 and 26, who are currently or were previously in foster care, are eligible for emergency Pandemic Relief Funds through the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act. More than \$4.1 million will be available to youth in South Carolina to be distributed by the South Carolina Department of Social Services' (SCDSS) [Chafee/ETV Program](#). The program works to help young people in the successful transition to adulthood.

Currently in South Carolina, there are 3,847 youth potentially eligible for a share of this targeted stimulus support. The potential benefits for eligible youth include funds to assist with basic needs like food, access to technology, and other expenses. The ETV award is also temporarily raised to up to \$12,000 per academic year for higher education. Assistance and resources are also available to help eligible youth get into or maintain a home. These are just some of the benefits. Michael Leach, DSS State Director says, "these funds are a tremendous help to both our current and recent foster youth. They will now have greater flexibility to pursue their professional, career, and education goals by lessening the burden of day-to-day expenses."

More information on this one-time funding opportunity can be found on the agency's website [here](#). Additional questions can be sent directly to the program by calling 803-995-0835 or by emailing IndependentLiving@dss.sc.gov. To see media coverage of this announcement, click [here](#) and [here](#).

May is Foster care Awareness Month



May is recognized as Foster Care Awareness Month. The month-long observance is an opportunity to draw attention to the need for foster parents across the state. Children come into foster care when their parents cannot safely care for them and no other alternative for placement presently exists. As of April 27th, the [SCDSS Foster Care Dashboard](#) showed 4,035 children in foster care in South Carolina.

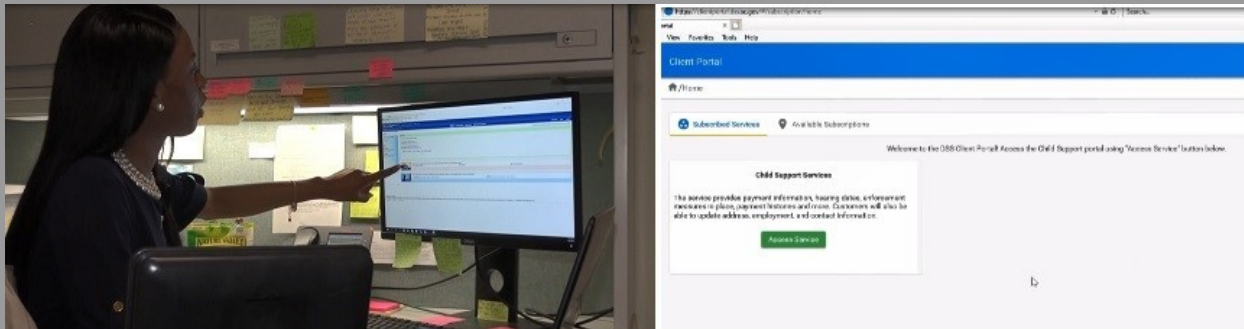
With many children and youth facing increased isolation over the past year, it is more important than ever for communities to work together to establish meaningful connections for children and youth in care. This year, [National Foster Care Month](#) focuses on how to strengthen these connections and the role of family and youth engagement at every stage—from ensuring all families and youth have meaningful involvement in court hearings and case planning to making it possible for youth to stay connected to their parents and extended support systems while in foster care. Authentically engaging youth and families can lead to increased family stabilization and expedite reunification and permanency.

South Carolina continues to need additional homes, so children can remain in their counties of origin, sibling groups can stay together, and teens can be cared for in the home of a loving family. SCDSS is continuing the licensing process for families who have expressed an interest in fostering. Many of the steps to begin the process can be completed online and trainings are being offered virtually.

To learn about becoming a foster parent or ways to support foster parents in your community, visit [here](#).

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES





New Child Support Portal Offers Expanded Convenience and Options

Individuals paying or receiving child support now have a new and more convenient way to manage their cases with the recent launch of a new stand-alone customer service portal. The portal allows users to inquire about their case status virtually on a 24/7 basis. That means questions that users might ordinarily have to call or visit a local DSS office for can now usually be answered by simply creating an account and logging on.

After creating an account, users will be able to view their latest payment information, any upcoming hearings and update their personal information. In addition, parents will be able to make online payments, save or print a copy of their payment histories, have access to applications for services, and even find a glossary of common Child Support terminology.

Tim Mose, SCDSS Child Support Services Division Director says, "Customer service is extremely important to DSS and the Child Support Services Division. To give our customers the access that they need, and that our current technology allows, we have created a Client Portal that will answer just about any question about their cases – from payments made and payment history to upcoming hearings."

Customers wishing to use the portal, once they have gone through an identity verification process contained within the site, must first create a unique User ID and password. Users will then be able to review key information about their cases.

Access the portal [here](#) or click [here](#) for a video tutorial on how to navigate the portal.

SC Paternity Opportunity Program ...because establishing a legal father benefits everyone

What is Paternity? Paternity means legal fatherhood. If parents were unmarried at the time of the child's birth, they can complete a Paternity Acknowledgement Affidavit to create a legal connection between the child and their biological father. How does establishing paternity help my child?

- **Self Esteem** – All children benefit from knowing both parents care for them.
- **Family Identity** – Establishing paternity often affords children extended families and relationships with both sides of the family.
- **Shared Parenting** – Establishes parenting as the responsibility of both parents.
- **Health History** – Establishing paternity often increases the availability of health information.

Click [here](#) for additional resources for establishing paternity.



ADULT ADVOCACY

Protection. Respect. Independence.



Click here to visit our website to learn more about Adult Protective Services

History of Adult Protective Services

Protection. Respect. Independence.

The earliest study of APS in the United States was conducted in 1960. In 1968, there were only a small number of community-based APS programs in the country. The real drive for states to provide adult protective services came with the passage of Title XX of the Social Security Act in 1974.

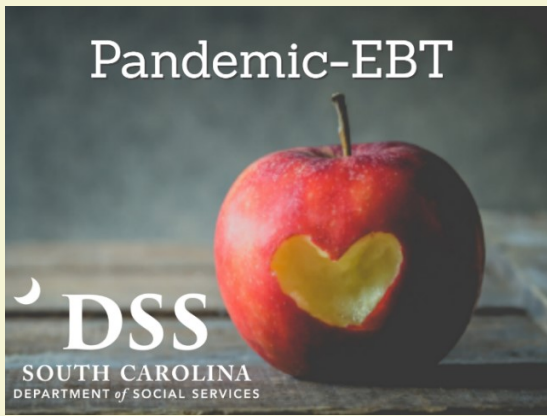
In 1978, almost twenty states had protective services for adults, and by 1981, all 50 states, in one way or another, had an office that provided protective services to some part of the adult population. However, it wasn't until 1993 that the Omnibus Adult Protection Act was passed. This is the law that governs APS in South Carolina. [Source: National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA).]

To report suspected Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation of a Vulnerable Adult, call 1-888-CARE4US (1-888-227-3487) or click [here](#) to make a report online.

ECONOMIC SERVICES

Family Assistance | Early Care & Education | Employment Services





Spreading the Word About Pandemic-EBT for SC Children

DSS has been working to make sure the public is informed that South Carolina has obtained approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service for issuance of Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits to eligible K-12 students for the 2020-2021 school year. P-EBT is an optional federal program designed to provide food benefits to children who have temporarily lost access to free and reduced-price meals at school due to school closures triggered by COVID-19.

More than 432,000 P-EBT cards have been mailed out as of April 26, 2021 for students eligible for P-EBT benefits for the months of September 2020-February 2021. All P-EBT eligible students, including child(ren) in active SNAP households, will receive a new P-EBT card for the 2020-2021 school year. For the 2020-21 school year, eligible children will receive a P-EBT benefit based on the number of days they attend school virtually each month. Children must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for P-EBT benefits:

- Enrolled in a free and reduced-price school meals program or attending a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school.
- Attending a school experiencing pandemic-triggered closures or reduced attendance/hours
- Attending school virtually, either full-time or on a hybrid schedule.

For the 2019-2020 school year, DSS issued nearly \$159 million in P-EBT benefits to approximately 481,114 eligible children in SC. For more information on P-EBT and frequently asked questions about the program, click [here](#).

Child Care Provider Background Check Extension

A federal waiver extends the deadline for child care providers to complete background checks to September 30, 2021, due to the extraordinary circumstances caused by COVID-19. The extended background check project resumed in March for the Lowcountry Region and will begin on May 17, 2021 for the Pee Dee Region. Background checks for child care providers began in late 2019 for the Midlands and Upstate regions.



Providers are asked to have all fingerprints completed and the DSS Form 1706 Questionnaire should be submitted to the DSS Office of Inspector General within 2 days of getting fingerprinted. Child Care Providers are to have their staff fingerprinted no later than 45 days of their rollout date for their region. DSS will continue reimbursing providers 50% of the cost of the fingerprinting.

Learn more or apply at www.scchildcare.org.

Helping Individuals Achieve Stability through Employment

The [SCDSS Division of Employment Services](#) works to support business owners who hire **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program participants entering the workforce. When you hire our customers, you become eligible for a variety of benefits, incentives and supports designed to meet your specific needs. Hiring from DSS can provide both your business and your new employee a promising future. We assist with:

- Tax credit opportunities for employers
- Workforce Consultants statewide
- Vocational assessments
- Pre-screened job referrals
- Background screening
- Ongoing assistance



Click here to view a [video](#) about how our partnership with Homes of Hope in Greenville, SC is changing lives!



Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Returns to SC

On May 1, the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) returns with goals of supplementing the diets of low-income seniors with fresh, nutritious produce and supporting South Carolina's small farmers.

This seasonal USDA grant program allows qualifying individuals to purchase unprocessed fruits and vegetables from authorized farmers' markets, roadside stands and community-supported agriculture programs.

Participants receive \$25 in the form of five checks (\$5 each) to spend at authorized locations. Checks are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. To qualify, South Carolina residents must be aged 60 or older with a yearly income of \$23,832 or less (\$32,232 for 2 people), and have a valid driver's license or state-issued ID.

The SFMNP program is statewide with the exception of Bamberg, Greenwood, Laurens, Newberry and Pickens Counties. Seniors interested in applying should visit the [DSS website](#) and **complete an online application between May 1st and June 1st**. The SFMNP is administered by the South Carolina Department of Social Services. For more information, contact Willie Nixon (803) 898-1760 or email at SFMNP-Applications@dss.sc.gov.



Connecting Job Seekers with a Brighter Future

On Wednesday, March 24th, a Drive-Thru Job Fair was held at two locations along Shop Road in Columbia. Cars were lined up early outside Harvest Hope Food Bank as workers passed out packets of information from participating employers. Just a mile down the road, the SC Works truck and the Blood Connection were both stationed in the parking lot of the SC DMV. Organizers report there were 225 total clients recorded at Harvest Hope. Of those, 162 were unemployed.

Thanks to all the sponsors, including the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce who helped make the event a success. You can learn more about the Drive-Thru Job Fair [here](#).



Partner Spotlights & Community Support



South Carolina Foster Parent Association's Social Worker of the Month

SCDSS would like to congratulate Program Manager Jennifer James with Greenville County DSS! She has been named South Carolina Foster Parent Association's Social Worker for April 2021.

People who choose social work as a career, dedicate their lives to helping children and families, and do so tirelessly and joyfully deserve to be recognized. Jennifer James is one of those people. One foster parent had this to say, "I have had the pleasure of working with Jennifer for the past two years and she is tireless in her efforts to support foster children, foster parents and kinship families. She comes in on weekends and will stay late to make a

situation better. Jennifer has an infectious positive attitude and is very encouraging to everyone."

Jennifer coordinates the Christmas present drive for both the foster children and kinship children. She coordinated restructuring the closet at DSS so that it is organized and set up to provide each child with necessities for the first three days upon entering care. In addition, she coordinated getting new car seats which are standardized for all of Greenville DSS and trains caseworkers on how to correctly install them. Jennifer also coordinates the backpack back to school drive each year to help offset the cost of school supplies for foster children; and helps coordinate having snacks and gift cards for restaurants so that when kids are at DSS they can be fed while waiting for a placement. Congratulations, Jennifer!

Celebrating a Thoughtful Donation

By Lynne Pinson, PC II, Foster Family & Licensing Support

Tod and Gretchen Sawyer do a project each year to commemorate when they adopted their four children from foster care. The Sawyers first adopted one child, then a sibling group of three from DSS. The two oldest children pictured are their biological children.

This year, to celebrate the adoption of their last three children, the Sawyers were supported by their church family to raise money to purchase, fill and decorate 183 "sweet cases" through sweetcases.org. These bags were distributed to the DSS offices in Aiken, Edgefield, McCormick, and Richland. (Photo shared with permission).



**Report abuse and neglect
of children and vulnerable adults.**

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES

1-888-CARE4US

Click the red "Report Abuse" button to make an online report of suspected abuse and/or neglect, now!



Report Abuse

Reporters may remain anonymous or provide contact information to receive follow up on the outcome of their report.

SC Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202-1520



www.DSS.sc.gov

SC Department of Social Services | P.O. Box 1520, 1535 Confederate Ave., Columbia, SC
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